

World Citizens of the World, Unite! Only Cosmopolitanism Can Save Us Now

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'But if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what citizenship means.'

These words spoken by British Prime-Minister Theresa May at the Conservative Party's conference have a dark past and cast a long shadow on our present. They are the expression of a prejudice that, for lack of a better word, we could call cosmophobia – the aversion to whom or what is cosmopolitan or advocates political cosmopolitanism, i.e. global citizenship and democracy also beyond national borders. The targets of this prejudice are often portrayed as disconnected from their kith and kin, possibly even disloyal. Theresa May herself preceded her condemnation of the cosmopolitan sentiment with the example of people who 'behave as though they have more in common with international elites than with the people down the road, the people they employ, the people they pass on the street.'

As some have quickly pointed out, this attack inescapably brings to mind the famous 'rootless cosmopolitan' label that dominated one of the stages of Stalinist paranoia. First intended as an attack on intellectuals who watched (and even pretended to enjoy) foreign movies, it then came to be understood as meaning one thing only: a rootless cosmopolitan was without any doubt a Jew. But at least the Stalinists' diatribe, maybe because communism was still supposed to be an international movement, implicitly allowed for the existence of cosmopolitans that were 'rooted'. Theresa May's use of the word goes much further in theory, although one hopes not in practical terms: for her, being a cosmopolitan means: not being with the common people, not hearing what they say and not caring for their problems. It probably means not being able to love your country or to care about its future, because you are too focused on the world, its problems and its future.

And even though this sentiment is nothing new and comes from a dark period in history in which not only Jews, but also Jesuits and gypsies were accused of these very same things – Theresa May has managed to take it even further: if you're a citizen of the world you don't even know the meaning of 'citizenship'.

And to this, the only possible reaction is: how dare she?

First, how dare she be so ignorant? Cosmopolitans not only do not ignore the meaning of citizenship, as the meaning is there at heart of their self-definition, which started more than two-thousand years ago when someone asked the philosopher Diogenes (the 'Cynic') whether he was from Athens or Sparta – then at war. His reply 'I am neither Athenian nor Spartan, but a citizen of the world' – a κοσμοπολίτης, from the Greek for world+citizen. Citizenship, is what cosmopolitanism is all about: rather than being subjects or vassals, a cosmopolitan needs to be a citizen in order to be of the world.

Secondly, how dare she be so dismissive? Cosmopolitans come from all walks of life. They are the corner shop owners and their sons and daughters. They are the refugees who long for their homeland and learn to love their host country. They are sometimes the holders of the first diploma in their families who went somewhere else thanks to the Erasmus programme and fell in love with someone from the other corner of the continent. In many parts of the world, it is the common people, the men and women in the street, who are part of the

cosmopolitan experience: the truck driver, the plumber (Polish or otherwise), the nanny and the gardener. It is them who Theresa May fails to see when she passes them by on the street. It is with them that her government fails to empathise. And beware, because there are many like us: as the *Washington Post* rightly remembered, half of the world's citizens self-define as being citizens of the world, either before or alongside considering themselves citizens of their countries. According to the GlobeScan consultancy and, ironically, the BBC World Service, this year is the first where there is 'a global majority for global citizenship'. And it's about time: with so many global crises on the horizon, global citizens are the best citizens that the world and also their respective countries can hope for.

Finally, how dare she be so patronisingly immoral? Of course, she is not alone in this, but in her whole speech she insinuates that 'working class people' (an expression she used many times) are racist and xenophobic, but that the bigotry of the lower classes is somehow more acceptable because it is partially explained by their socioeconomic conditions. If you scratch the surface a bit you will find the generalist prejudice that workers are simple like children, but that like children they somehow 'tell the truth', that then politicians and commentators are duty-bound to listen. And this is how politicians and commentators manage to be doubly prejudiced: towards the working class and towards the 'others' that workers are supposed to dislike, and at the same time appear clean as the prejudice is in the end not theirs. This is what I call 'patronisingly immoral'. It is also factually wrong. There are racists and bigots among the poorer classes as there are among the richer ones. But one thing is for sure: working class or otherwise, nobody is entitled to a *carte blanche* as far as racism and prejudice are concerned. Angelifying the working class, as the Left also has done traditionally, is as silly as demonising it. Something immoral is still immoral even if said by a worker. That a person who expresses a prejudice may be labelled 'loser of globalisation' doesn't make this prejudice any more respectable

But enough of dismantling cosmophobia – what we now need to do is stand up for cosmopolitanism. In the past our predecessors let themselves be cowed easily. These days we must not succumb to that. We must proudly affirm that we are indeed citizens of the world. We must flatly refuse that this in some way detracts from our citizenship of our countries, of our regions or of the European Union. We must know and cherish the intellectual heritage of cosmopolitanism, from Diogenes via Kant to Hannah Arendt and beyond.

In fact, with the world in a deep and multifaceted crisis, only cosmopolitanism can save us. We must again and again present cosmopolitan solutions to contemporary problems: humanitarian international passports as a solution for the global refugee crisis; an International Court against environmental crime as a way to fight against climate change, deforestation, land grabbing and oceanic pollution; global taxation of multinationals to alleviate poverty around the world and combat the vices of globalisation; a Parliamentary Assembly of the United Nations to strive for a more open and transparent global order; the strengthening of regional court systems to allow any citizen to defend him or herself against human rights violations.

Cosmopolitans are not any less empathic or caring or connected to their fellow citizens and their planet or country than anyone else. In fact, they may be even more of these things: the empathy of a cosmopolitan is not interrupted at the border or the limited by the ID card or nationality status of the person that we meet on the street. But at the same time, yes, cosmopolitans do worry about what happens in the other side of the world, and rightly so, as the world has now become too small for anything to be truly foreign to us.

So dear fellow citizens of the world, let's add a decidedly political and civic layer to the cultural and social ground where our cosmopolitanism is rooted. We may be socialist or liberal, progressive or conservative, religious or secular, gay or straight, intensely patriotic or indifferent to the nation, but we all know that we cannot afford to let the world sink again into feudal nationalistic close-minded aggressiveness. We have nothing to lose but the chains in today's minds. World citizens of the world, unite! We have a world to win.